

Structured parking is an important element in a well design urban environment. As the size of buildings or areas devoted to parking can easily overwhelm the overall environment, it is important to design facilities which minimize these impacts and provide the appropriate levels of parking in the needed locations.

Urban Contextuality

Structured Parking Concealed within Building

Above ground structured parking is best concealed with active uses lining the perimeter of the parking deck on all or most sides. This approach the master planning of a development allows the lower cost of building parking above ground while eliminating the need to create façade treatments on exposed sides.

Pedestrian Activation

In the urban context, pedestrian activation of the first floor is an important essential quality that gives city's their unique quality. Prioritizing the appropriate level of activation and prioritizing which facades of the structure on a multiple street site should be "most" active are also important factors. Pedestrian activation in structured parking is most often achieved through uses such as restaurants, retail, active lobby areas, or other function where people will be present and lights will be on a good number of evening hours. In some settings such as a residential neighborhood, an active first floor may often be inappropriate, and in those cases, a street level treatment that is pedestrian scaled, layered and proportionate to the neighborhood is best employed.

Urban Proportions - Verticality in Facades

In urban areas, buildings tend to have balanced vertical and horizontal proportions. Long, horizontal forms typically found in many example of structured parking relate more to the auto-dominated forms found in the suburbs. Repetitive vertical elements can also create an inappropriate monotony when balanced horizontal elements are not a part of the composition.

Parking Structure façade proportions in urban areas should be visually broken down into clear vertical bays, spaced no more than 20' or 30' apart, help to aid in maintaining these vertical proportions. These building bays can be developed by expressive engaged columns, either structural or decorative, or by the ventilation openings found in the wall. In some cases, additive elements can help to create a vertical pattern to the façade.

When floor levels of the garage are evident in the façade, sloping floors often necessary in the functional design should not be expressive to the exterior. Sloping floors should occur on the internal part of the site, along the alley, or if needed along a street, should be hidden with a concealing façade.

Urban Proportions – Solid and Void

Successful buildings in urban city environments generally possess a good balance between the solid and void areas on building facades. Structure should avoid the extremes of large solid wall areas, or open, unscreened lack of a façade. A façade wall is needed on a freestanding or integral structure, and appropriate balance between solid and void is important to allow the structure to blend into the urban setting.

Human Scale - Overall Proportions

Urban buildings express proportion more related to the human scale, with smaller building bays and more detailed, finer grained. Human scaled elements relate to openings between solid and void being sized in proportion to the “human form”, or in other words smaller in size. Large wall spans, oversized opening and materials with little scale, such as un-scored concrete, can have an overwhelming effect due to their large scale. Layered elements can also add a sense of human scale as well as assisting with the verticality of proportions. Layered elements can even be landscaping placed directly in front of the façade wall in situations where pedestrian level activation is not necessarily needed.

Human Scale - Detailed Elements

A façade of the structured parking building should possess smaller, detailed elements to further refine the human scale quality. While decorative additive elements might be used, functional elements, such as guard rails at the bottom of openings in the façade, or well designed security grills can give this finer level of detail.